CREATOR

VOLUME 30 NUMBER 1

Grassland Glory

"Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." Isaiah 6:3

Grasslands have often been compared to great bodies of water. The Serengeti (Swahili for "endless plains") is known locally as a "sea of grass." In these immense ecosystems—which once covered 40 percent of Earth's surface—we find Christ's limitless love engulfing and protecting the life He has placed there. The foundation for these grassy environments is a beautiful mixture of ground-up rock and rich soils created by our Lord Jesus to be a *refuge* for His grassland creatures. And it is a striking reminder that the Lord *is the only Refuge* from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10). As His people, we too have been swallowed up in the ocean of our Creator's love!

Dung beetle

Enriching the Soil

You visit the earth . . . You greatly enrich it. Psalm 65:9

The Serengeti horizon swells with wildebeests and zebras peacefully grazing under clear blue skies. Abedi, a student of mammalian ecology from a local university, stands silently studying them. As he joyfully watches, his older friend, Hans Seismo, has chosen a more "earthy" subject to investigate.
Professor Seismo: "Abedi, these dung beetles are absolutely fascinating! Jesus uses them to help enrich the soil of this grassland."
Our ever-inquisitive Professor is on all fours observing the activities of dung beetles, oblivious to the activities around him.[1]
Abedi: "Profesa, your love for Christ our Creator and the children you serve is obvious, but it reveals itself in some strange ways!"

October 8

Some African dung beetles collect animal feces, form it into a ball, and then roll it to their nest. These special insects use dung as food. Jesus also gave them the amazing ability to navigate at night using, of all things, the Milky Way!

1 Professor Seismo (pronounced SIZE - mo) and Adebi are fictitious characters. Abedi is a Swahili name that means, "worshiper."

Professor Seismo: "Abedi, Jesus has given me a burning desire to seek His glory everywhere, even in the most mundane of places. His gift of dung beetles adds to the health of the Serengeti ecosystem, revealing His great love for His Father's glory and the people who live here."

Abedi comes from a humble tribe of people, the Maasai (mah - SYE), yet he has never known anyone to stoop so intently and watch dung being rolled across the ground.

Professor Seismo: "As you know, Abedi, the large mammals you research and so enjoy produce a lot of dung.[2] If these waste products were allowed to accumulate, this grassland would become uninhabitable."

Abedi: "Like a home full of trash?"

Professor Seismo: "Yes! Our Lord carefully crafted over 7,000 different species of dung beetles—one or more for each type of dropping His animals leave behind."

Due to the intensity of his downward focus, Seismo is completely unaware that two baboons have drawn close, captivated by his prone posture. One of the primates starts imitating the Professor by looking at the ground and picking at it. The other grabs Seismo's safari hat, puts it on his own head, and runs away. Hans remains unflinchingly engrossed in his work.

Abedi: "Mwenye radhi hasumbuki."[3]

Professor Seismo: "Yesu Kristo[4] uses dung beetles the world over to help nourish His grasslands. These Serengeti species form an almost perfect ball of dung that they roll to their nest. Eventually, the feces is broken down into tiny particles, which God applies as fertilizer to enrich the soil. Abedi, it's amazing that our Creator fashioned each species of dung beetle to clean up *only one type of dung* dropped by a grazing animal."

Abedi: "Isn't Mungu[5] wonderful, Profesa?!"

2 The daily droppings of just one elephant can support over two million dung beetles!
3 A Swahili proverb: "He who is blessed is not disturbed."
4 "Yesu Kristo" is Swahili for Jesus Christ.
5 "Mungu" is Swahili for God.

Grassland Types

Then God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed . . . after their kind with seed in them"; and it was so. . . . and God saw that it was good.
Genesis 1:11, 12

Our Lord Jesus fashioned four main kinds of grasslands in the World: *Savannas*, *Steppes*, *Pampas*, and *Prairies*.

Savannas

Most equatorial grasslands, like the Serengeti, are savannas. The grasses found in them possess blades larger than those of temperate regions and are sometimes oval in shape. Our Lord sewed savannas into a belt of continents that wrap around our planet—Africa, Australia, and South America. These tropical grasslands have distinct wet and dry seasons, with wildfires occurring during the latter. They also feature large mammals—this is especially true in Africa. Although many grasslands showcase an abundance of flowers, Jesus sovereignly planted the greatest number in tropical savannas. The South African veld[6] alone boasts 1,750 flower species!

Agulhas Plain of South Africa

6 Veld is an Afrikaans word meaning "field."
Wildebeest is also an Afrikaans word that means "wild beast."

Steppes

Steppes are semi-arid grasslands that Christ sowed much further north than the savannas of Africa. The great Eurasian Steppe stretches 5,000 miles (8,000 km) from Hungary (where it's called "Puszta"), through Romania, southern Ukraine, Russia, northern Kazakhstan, southern Siberia, Mongolia, and into northeast China. Summers are warm and dry, winters are cold and windy. Precipitation is limited, appearing mostly from November through March. The Lord scattered many short bunchgrasses in these steppes along with small

Ukrainian grassland

thorny trees and bushes. Steppes are also blessed with the world's most fertile soils—the *chernozems*. This name is derived from two Russian words meaning "black earth." The stone steppes of Ukraine feature rocky outcroppings similar in appearance to those in the Serengeti.[7] Mammals are not as numerous as those found in tropical savannas, yet Christ's incomparable creativity has populated the Eurasian Steppe with unique animals of its own. Among them is the Saiga Antelope, a nomadic ungulate that lives on *Stipa* grasses.

Female Saiga Antelope

Pampas

South American grasslands represent a mixture of either savannas and/or steppes. Most famous are the Pampas of eastern Argentina, southern Brazil, and Uruguay. Here, vast plains of relatively flat grasslands stretch as far as the eye can see. The climate is moderate with warm summers, cool winters, and evenly distributed rainfall throughout the year. Wild animals include puma, rhea, capybara (the world's largest rodent), viscacha, maned wolf, deer, and guinea pig. These grasslands lack trees and are unique in possessing few or no legumes or herbs—composed almost entirely of bunchgrasses.

October 10

Grasslands are a living carpet Christ uses to soften and nurture the world with His love. Better still, we can think of each grassland as a unique ecosystem—"an oriental rug"—of fantastic complexity and beauty that adorns Earth with Chirst's glory in unique ways.

Prairies

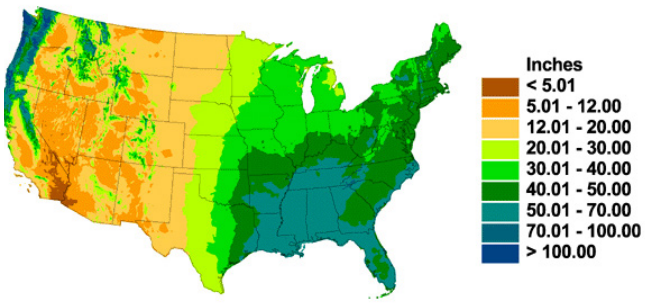
The iconic Great Plains of North America are known the world over for their often romanticized history of cowboys and westward settlement. Our Creator Jesus has blessed North America with some of the most fertile soils on Earth. Unlike savannas, the prairies (prairie is a French word meaning "meadow") of North America experience hot and wet summers, cold and dry winters.

The northern plains of the United States and Canada suffer some of the coldest and windiest climates on Earth, second only

7 See the back side of ***kids' kreation*** # 121.

to Siberia. Christ often covers these vast grasslands with a blanket of snow, insulating His creatures from the harshest of winter conditions.

Our Lord Jesus also created a special gradient of rainfall in the Midwest which deeply influences the kinds of grasses that grow there. An imaginary line runs from the Rio Grande north into Canada that receives about 30 inches (75 cm) of rain per year. If you travel west from this line, rainfall decreases by around one inch every 15 miles (24 km). The opposite is true; precipitation increases roughly one inch for every 15 miles you go.



The Great Plains do not support the variety of mammals found in the African savannas, but our Lord Jesus gifted these grasslands with some *keystone*[8] creatures of their own—the bison and the pronghorn. Christ lovingly planted a variety of Poaceae[9] here, including the *tall grasses* of eastern Kansas that once carpeted this region, growing almost ten feet high (3 meters)!

8 A keystone species is an organism that has a significant influence on an ecosystem.

9 Pronounced poe - AYE - see - eye, is another name for grass. See the ***CREATOR Journal*** Volume 29 Number 3.

Grassland Characteristics

He is before all things,
and in Him all things hold together. Colossians 1:17

- Grasslands have some of the blackest, richest, and most fertile soils on the planet.
- These ecosystems receive enough rain from the Lord to nourish grasses but not enough to support many trees.
- Jesus crafted grassy realms as safe havens or refuges for His plants and animals.
- Without question, our omnipotent God demonstrates His fierce power through grassland thunderstorms—most notably in *Tornado Alley* of the Central Great Plains.
- As with all of nature, grasslands reveal the infinite genius of Christ our Creator! Thousands of different mammals, birds, insects, and specially designed plants live harmoniously with one another.
- Grasslands are sensitive to weather patterns and always changing. It would be very difficult to predict what each might look like ten years from now.
- **Grasslands also . . .**
  – represent an environment somewhere between a forest and a desert.
  – struggle for enough water to survive. (They experience more evaporation than precipitation.)
  – experience periodic fires.
  – have rolling to flat terrain.
  – harbor numerous grazers (ungulates).[10]
  – feature several grass species intermixed with herbs and legumes.
  – showcase hopping/leaping animals: grasshoppers, rabbits, kangaroos, jumping mice, and gazelles. (Jumping allows them to briefly see above the grasses.)
  – are home to the world's fastest mammals (cheetah, pronghorn).
  – generally possess few trees (no perches), so our Creator provided birds the ability to sing and worship Him while flying!

10 Read about ungulates in the ***CREATOR Journal*** Volume 29 Number 2.

ON SOMETHING OF
THE COUNTRY SUMMER

Long and meadowy grasses
Dappled with goldenrod
And red clover
With ambrosial fragrances
Fill the currents of summer.

As saccharine as molasses,
White blackberry blossoms
And honeysuckle
Replete with sweet redolence—
Ah, these likewise become her!

© Kate Elizabeth Sgambati

The Soil of Life

[Who makes] "the seeds of grass to sprout?"
Job 38:27

In Matthew 13, our Lord presents the parable of four soils. Only the fourth soil—*a good soil*—yielded a crop. It is clear from this teaching and other passages of Scripture that this "good soil" represents Christ's Spirit. His Gospel can only take root in our lives if our good God resides in us since we have no goodness of our own (see Mark 10:18).

Peter likens his Savior to a "living stone" (1 Peter 2:4), *the Living Rock*. With Christ's parable in view (above), we can make a case that the soil of grasslands is a type of living rock and a shadow of the Almighty (Psalm 91:1-2), *the Good Soil*. For bedrock to become soil, it must first be crushed, which God does in the hidden depths of Earth. He then mixes it with organic material, both living and dead. Only then is it a suitable substrate in which life can flourish. It was also necessary for Christ, the Living Rock, to take on human flesh and be crushed (Isaiah 53:5) to become the suitable Soil of Eternal Life for His people.

Our Lord applies layers of stones, sand, and soil on top of the underlying bedrock of grasslands to create a habitat for life. The bedrock is often granite but can be limestone or chalk. As we've pointed out, Jesus creates the top layer of soil from a mixture of finely pulverized bedrock and organic material (the stuff of life). Soil thus represents the rock foundation from which it came.[11] So also, Christ is the "exact representation of" God's nature (Hebrews 1:3)—the Living Rock *from above* begotten of the Father. And we can think of grassland soil as a type of "living rock" derived from a stony foundation *below*.

Grassland soils provide stability, shelter, and food (directly or indirectly) for countless creatures. In the scorching heat of summer, the soil beneath the surface remains relatively cool. In winter, driving winds cannot touch this subterranean world—it is a refuge from storm and sleet, fire and frost. And it faithfully testifies to the infinitely greater Refuge, who is Christ our Lord!

The Approaching Storm

The Lord who makes the storm clouds . . .
He will give them showers of rain. Zechariah 10:1

Professor Seismo looks up from his research and sees blinding ribbons of light piercing the sky. A thunderhead has been steadily growing in the west for the past hour. It now overshadows the grazing animals below, making them appear quite small. Even the huge elephants are dwarfed by the immensity of the approaching storm!

11 Much of the soil of Serengeti is also mixed with the ash of ancient volcanoes.

Professor Seismo: "Abedi, I'm going to look for my hat before the storm arrives."
Abedi: "OK, Profesa. Kukaa salama!"[12]

Abedi remains close to the Land Rover to take some weather readings. Meanwhile, the Professor has gone to hunt for the hat that the baboon had taken from him.

After a short search, Hans spies it floating in a large mud puddle used by elephants. He carefully steps into the water of the puddle but his boots immediately sink into the thick, sticky ooze and become stuck. Despite being unable to move his feet, he bends over to snatch the hat out of the water. Unfortunately, he loses his balance and face plants into the deep, brown muck and now cannot straighten up.

Two passing Maasai warriors observe the strange sight . . . a man bent over at the waist with arms stretched out in front of him, and the top of his noggin planted in the mud, looking much like an ostrich hiding its head in the ground! They quickly run to help Professor Seismo, each grabbing a shoulder and pulling him to an upright position. Once they've assured themselves that he is alright, large smiles come across their faces. Before leaving, the warriors help the humbled man out of the water. The Professor profusely thanks the two kind strangers in their native tongue and starts back to Abedi and the Land Rover.

Abedi: "Profesa! What happened to you? You look like some kind of mud monster!"

Professor Seismo: "In His kindness and love, the Lord saw fit to humble me, Abedi."

Less than two hours ago a bolt of lightning ignited the dry grasses of the Serengeti near Professor Seismo and Abedi. It is not difficult for Christ our Creator to start a blaze using atmospheric electricity as it heats the surrounding air to 50,000° F.[13] (see Jeremiah 32:17). A great conflagration in the grassland advances quickly, consuming everything in its path. Flames fed by westerly winds reach the height of bull elephants.

The regular seasonal displays of electricity in the Serengeti announce two God-given events: wildfires and the arrival of the rainy season. Before the rains begin, our Lord dries the grasses of the savanna through months of drought. He then uses fire to remove inedible plants, making way for new, nutritious vegetation.

Maasai warriors

Grassland fires release much-needed minerals and nutrients back into the soil. Our Lord Jesus also uses fire to keep these ecosystems pure. Non-native woody plants—foreign shrubs and trees—frequently invade grasslands, potentially upsetting their God-given balance and harmony. Christ, therefore, applies fire to destroy these invaders and purify the landscape. Flames do consume the upper portions of native grasses as well, yet 60 to 80 percent of their living structure is

12 Swahili for "Please stay safe!"

13 Please see the ***CREATOR Journal*** Volume 25 Number 4 / 28,000° C.

buried below ground, safe from the heat of the inferno. Once the fires have consumed their fill and died out, our Lord quickly causes the surviving roots and rhizomes to produce fresh, tender, nutritious shoots in the rain that follows. And as the grass flourishes, an estimated one million five-hundred thousand herbivores living in western Tanzania are led by Christ's Spirit in a trek back to the eastern part of the country. All this happens through the hand of our sovereign, omnipotent, and good Creator!
Professor Seismo pulls a crumpled sticky note out of his moist pocket. On it, he has written some firsthand observations.

October 26

The combustion of the grassland began instantaneously and the heat was overwhelming. Tongues of fire grew out of the fields before us, accompanied by thick, black smoke pouring out from below. A terrifying and impenetrable wall of raging orange and yellow soon stood before me. The creatures that could run or fly fled with the greatest of speed. Abedi and I also fled in our Land Rover!

October 28

My research in prairies has shown that a grassland fire will advance at about 20 percent of the wind velocity. If it blows at 25 mph (40 km/h) then the wildfire will move forward about 5 mph (8 km/h), which means that a house 4 miles away will be engulfed in less than an hour!

The average above-ground temperature of grassland fires is 200° to 1,300° F (95° to 700° C). Wildfires in tall-grass prairies can reach an incredible 1,650° F (900°C). This is hot enough to begin melting aluminum, brass, and bronze! Despite these lethal temperatures, our great Creator Jesus has brilliantly engineered the underlying ground to insulate roots and rhizomes, burrows and bugs from heat. Generally, a fire will raise the temperature of the upper one-quarter inch of soil only momentarily. These hungry flames rapidly consume the upper portions of dead plant material left from last season's growth, as well as all invasive plant species. The bulk of native grasses remains safe, well protected by the soil fashioned by Christ over the centuries. His work in nature is not static (John 5:17).

The Serengeti Plain

The Purity of Christ's Work

"I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil" Malachi 3:11 ESV[14]

As the Lord protects His people, Jesus provides ecosystems with skillfully crafted and wonderfully designed refuges for His creatures. Plants and animals foreign to these environments *are not welcome* because they can disrupt their natural unity and harmony. Jesus gives each ecosystem means of excluding these "disrupters" using:

- humidity—too high or too low
- temperature—too hot or too cold
- toxic chemicals—deter invading plants[15]
- sunshine—too much or too little
- predators—carnivores
- fire

Lightning-caused wildfires the world over are a blazing testimony to God's desire to keep His handiwork pure. When an environment goes "wild," it often means that foreign plants and animals have forced themselves upon an ecosystem, making it unnaturally *inclusive*, upsetting Christ's Created Order. Such was the case when European rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) were introduced into Australia during the 18th century. In the absence of natural predators, they soon ate the grassy Australian landscape "out of house and home."

November 1

The Serengeti is driest in October. If lightning strikes, it is sure to cause a grassland fire. November represents the beginning of the rainy season. Great herds of wildebeest and zebras can be seen following rainstorms coming in from the west. Quickly, Creator Jesus transforms the dusty landscape into lush, green grass.

Our Lord Jesus tirelessly excludes many creatures from His divinely designed ecosystems. By using fire and other means to purify a grassland, God sets the stage for native grasses to show forth an explosion of color to the praise of His glory! If the seed of a tree penetrates a pristine landscape, sprouts, and grows tall, it's "asking for trouble." This invasive plant is much more likely to be struck by lightning than any other living thing surrounding it. We could say, that foreign invaders attract God's all-consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29; read Ecclesiastes 3:3).

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15 Native plants release chemicals—known as allelochemicals—into the soil or the air that inhibit the growth of invasive species.

The Grassland Refuge

But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my Refuge. Psalm 73:28

Our unchanging God provides refuge for many creatures during wildfires "until destruction passes by" (Psalm 57:1). It is necessary for a grassland to remain pure for Christ's glory to shine in it. As with all the ecosystems Jesus created, it is a *refuge* for many living things. Smaller animals like mice and rabbits can hide from predators in its thick, "grassy jungle." At ground level, these same creatures find relief from the summer heat in its deep shade. In addition, the dense grasses afford protection from driving winds. As we have seen, the greatest refuge grasslands can offer is safety from wildfires.

Overlying the bedrock of the Serengeti are several layers of sand and rocks. The crown of these layers is a wonderful mixture of finely ground granite, gneiss (pronounced "nice"), volcanic rock, and organic material. It is within this living carpet that many of Christ's creatures escape raging grassland fires.

We can almost hear each of the soil organisms and animals who retreat to underground burrows exclaim as the prophets did, "Do not be a terror to me; You are my Refuge in the day of disaster" (Jeremiah 17:17). "Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the burning of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire and the rocks are broken up by Him. The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble and He knows those who take refuge in Him" (Nahum 1:6-7). *It is good to fear God!* Although the Scripture promises above were made to God's people, we observe these truths mirrored in the ecosystems that are universally obedient in Christ's Created Order. (We see a similar parallel in the Bible when we compare Deuteronomy 29:5 to Matthew 6:28, and Deuteronomy 8:3 to Matthew 6:26.)

Grasslands constantly change and show forth the glory of their Creator in fresh ways. At the same time, they are being regularly challenged by invading "enemies" who don't belong. Our Lord Jesus wove this beautiful tapestry of plants and animals with infinite wisdom and skill. If the seeds of non-native plants or creatures from other ecosystems invade a grassland like the Serengeti, they can upset its God-given harmony and unity. When this happens, our Lord Jesus uses fire to purify His Creation. Isaiah 6:3 teaches us that God's glory and holiness kiss. Nature shines Christ's glory when it is kept *pure*.

All this begs an important question, "Are *you* deeply rooted in the soil of Christ's life?"

A Gracious Warning!

The Lord will pass over. Exodus 12:23

In the third, fourth, tenth, and twelfth chapters of Hebrews, God lovingly warns His people of the wrath that will consume all the disobedient in the world. Creation mirrors this warning through many natural disasters, including grassland wildfires. Christ's holiness is both "the fire" that purifies and "the soil" that protects. The nations cannot endure His indignation (Jeremiah 10:10), but nature can because Jesus is its Refuge. As God removed nations before Israel, He clears the grassland of "foreigners" so it may proclaim His glory. His hand faithfully sustains the very ground upon which we walk and from which grass grows.

Do you acknowledge that our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29) and steadfast in His purpose to purify His people from everything that pollutes mind and soul (Psalm 51:10; Jeremiah 16:18-19)? It is impossible to sincerely love God without first having our souls cleansed by His Spirit through the blood of Christ. Only then can we go on to purify our "souls for a sincere love of the brethren," "in obedience to the truth" (1 Peter 1:22). Jesus alone sets us free (John 8) to fervently love God and one another from our hearts.

The storm of God's wrath is all too real and fast approaching! No one will survive His fury at sin (Psalm 7:11) except *those hidden in Christ*. The Soil of Christ provides the only Refuge from His Father's burning wrath. In Jesus, we are "passed over," just as a raging wildfire passes over the soil creatures of a grassland without harming them.

Jesus died on the Cross to purify the hearts of those who would believe in Him and He gives us His Spirit to further sanctify us day by day. Those who refuse to receive Christ as their Lord and Savior will forever suffer the flames of His burning wrath in Hell—a terrifying thought! So, "today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 4: 7, 8a). If God enables you, follow the Good Shepherd (John 10:3-4,14), listen to His voice, and obey His call. If you are not sure of your salvation, we urge you to ask the Heavenly Father to give you His Spirit so that you might truly believe in His beloved Son (Romans 15:13). Confess your sins and trust that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life and that no one can come to the Father except through Him (John 14:6)!

The Church of the Living God welcomes people from all tribes, tongues, peoples, and nations who truly love Christ (Revelation 5:9) but not those who willfully disobey Him (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Our Father's family is a pure fellowship that *excludes* foreign invaders. Those with strange doctrines or false gospels are not welcome. The world hates this message, demanding that Christians openly embrace sin and rebellion. But if we love Jesus more than our own lives, we will follow Him alone and will not listen to false shepherds, but flee from them (John 10:5).

As our Refuge, Jesus is the Garden Soil in which God's people grow. He may bring fiery trials into our lives so that we are purified from the weeds of idolatry and iniquity. When this happens, we will produce more beautiful blooms than ever before, a loveliness that will adorn His kingdom forever!

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